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ABSTRACT

Trends in the academic field of adult education were examined by exploring the collective perspectives of 52 long-time university professors in the United States. The following data sources were used: biographical vitae; written responses to an interview guide; and semi-structured oral history interviews conducted primarily by telephone. The study findings were used to construct a model of the first three generations of adult education professors. Across the generations, the early experiences that led people to the academic field of adult education manifested similar patterns, with most individuals having come from teaching, cooperative extension, religious education, and military education. Most of those interviewed supported a definition of adult education emphasizing core beliefs about the unique differences separating adults from children as learners. Many were self-described generalists who referred to adult education as a field of practice focusing on concepts of androgyny and transformative learning. Areas of concern cited by those interviewed included the decline in university graduate programs, fragmentation of the field into various subfields of practice, increasingly narrow research and literature, and a lack of national political representation. (The following items are appended: list of participants; diagram of adult education genealogy; and information about the 18 individuals and 12 books most frequently identified as influential by practitioners.) (MN)

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ED 471 248

# CONVERSATIONS WITH LONG-TIME ADULT EDUCATORS:

# THE FIRST THREE GENERATIONS

*A research study presented at the*

American Association for Adult and Continuing Education
Annual Conference
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## ABSTRACT

This study analyzed trends in the academic field of Adult Education by examining the collective perspectives of the senior university professors who framed the field. This phenomenological qualitative research included the use of oral history semi-structured interviews, criterion and network sampling, member checks, microanalysis, and constant comparison. Using conversations and participants' written responses, a structural framework of themes was established to delineate the first three generations of Adult Education professors.

With the goal of collecting third-age wisdom, discussions centered on formative influences, accomplishments, disappointments, present involvement level, defining the field, trends/changes, graduate programs, national associations, and future perspectives. Most participants supported a definition of Adult Education that emphasized core beliefs about the unique differences separating adults from children as learners. Many were self-described generalists, referring to Adult Education as a field of practice, focusing on concepts of andragogy and transformative learning. Some individuals presented more global views, accentuating the widely diverse application opportunities of Adult Education theory in organizational and societal problem solving.

The implications of this research flowed from the reflective hindsight of the participants. Areas of concern cited were the decline in university graduate programs, fragmentation of the field into various sub-fields of practice, increasingly narrow research and literature, and a lack of political representation nationally. Graduate programs were described as too institutionalized and educational in nature, lacking interdisciplinary opportunities of earlier programs that included a balance of education, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and political science. The fragmenting movements mentioned most often were Adult Basic Education and Human Resource Development whose academic impact were identified as polarizing. Senior leaders recommended that contemporary members of the field work to bridge the gap between disparate camps and set a new course by collaborating on efforts to solve societal problems. Rather than viewing the diverse nature of the field as a roadblock, they suggested using it to develop leaders in various specialty areas, ultimately spreading the message of lifelong learning farther and wider in society. Their message was one of encouragement for future generations to work toward a unified field with a shared vision and mutual respect for diverse views.

## INTRODUCTION

Beginning in the early 1900s, research, development, and promotion of the academic field of Adult Education began to develop. Over the course of the first half of the 20th Century, the foundational building blocks of theory were established (Knowles, 1977). By the middle 1900s, several distinct trends were identified in the development of the field (Essert, 1967). These included a demand for both national and local integration of Adult Educational activities, growing financial support of the field by private foundations and the government, an increase in both the body of knowledge and numbers of students, and growth in the conscious existence of Adult Education within many institutions and organizations. As the 20th Century matured, graduate programs in the field experienced rapid expansion, a trend that can be traced through an examination of the academic genealogy of professors.

Two critical factors were the driving force behind the initiation of this study: timing and third-age wisdom. Over the past 3 years the field of adult education has lost 3 of its most respected and beloved founding members: Cyril Houle, Malcolm Knowles, and Paulo Freire. The tragedy of their deaths results from the lost opportunity to capture their late-life thoughts and reflections. Such reflective analysis is a key component of what adult development specialists refer to as third-age wisdom (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). At the time of this research, most of the first generation of professors had passed away or were at advanced ages. Until recently, little effort had been applied to collecting and analyzing their personal perspectives as they reflect back over their formative influences and professional experiences in the field.

The purpose, therefore, of this study was to add to the understanding of the academic field of Adult Education by examining the reflective wisdom and personal perspectives of those senior members who had developed the foundational theory and practice. This unique lens, through which the past has been examined, can provide a source for adding meaning to the present, and can potentially shape the future. The goal was to examine deeply the academic genealogy of the first generations of Adult Educators in the United States. The intent was to compare their perspectives both between and within generations; and, to examine their perceived impact on the evolution of the field. Beyond simple facts, this study provided an opportunity to engage participants in reflective dialogue regarding their passions, concerns, experiences, and goals in the field.

## METHODS

A phenomenological qualitative design was used to examine the collective perspectives of 52 long-time Adult Education professors in the United States. Participants were identified through the use of both criteria and network sampling methods. A complete list of participants is provided in Appendix A.

Data collection was triangulated through three sources: biographical vitas, written responses to an interview guide, and semi-structured oral history interviews conducted primarily by telephone. Using the constant comparison method, major points of each interview were reviewed prior to the next interview as a means to establish themes and

common patterns and potentially develop new questions. Content validation of each interview was established through member checks in which participants were offered the opportunity to review and correct their transcripts. Written responses to the Interview Guide and interview transcripts were micro analyzed and coded for themes. Validation of themes was accomplished by two pairs of independent reviewers. All four individuals were graduate students in education at different stages in the degree progress, each of whom had some interest in either the study or the research method. Two of the reviewers conducted a blind review of the data and two searched the data for themes that had been identified by the researcher.

## RESULTS

Derived from the problem statement, research questions served as a navigational tool, guiding the inquiry and determining how the data would be collected. They reflect the researcher's determination of the most pertinent factors to study. Results are presented as responses to each of the research questions based on the analysis of both the data collected about, and provided by the participants.

*1 - Can distinct generations of academic adult educators be identified?*

As a result of this research, a model of the first three generations of Adult Education professors was established and is presented as Figure 2 in the Appendix. During the first phase of interviewing, a preliminary model developed that suggested early forefathers such as Lyman Bryson and Eduard Lindeman might be considered part of the first generation, followed by the founders of CPAE, and subsequently their students. However, as interviews progressed and this preliminary model was presented to participants, several individuals disagreed. They argued that although such early founders were responsible for the first publications, they were not Adult Education professors and did not develop the first graduate programs. The preliminary generational structure was therefore modified and the founding members of CPAE were placed in first generation.

Difficulty still remained in determining the placement of participants in the model. Originally generational assignment was based simply on the major professor-to-student relationship. However as names were added, clear generational lines were unclear, particularly when students earned degrees early in a professor's career. This was resolved by adding each individual's year of graduation to the framework parameters, since socio-cultural atmosphere emerges as an important aspect of influence on the participants. As seen in Figures 2 and 3 (see Appendix B), criteria for placement in the generation involved earning a doctoral degree prior to 1955. Second and third generations were then established at 10-year intervals after 1955. Generations were therefore defined by both major professor-to-student relationship and a common same socio-cultural era.

*2 - What major influences have shaped the careers of each generation?*

Across generations, early experiences that led people to the academic field of Adult Education revealed similar patterns, with most individuals having come from teaching, Cooperative Extension, religious education, and military education. However,

religious education was limited to third generation participants only. The growth of opportunities for graduate study in Adult Education was evidenced in the steadily increasing numbers of universities from which participants graduated. All of the first-generation participants received their doctoral degrees in different but related fields. The number of degrees in Adult Education increased steadily in the subsequent generations.

When asked about the major influences that affected their careers, participants described specific people whom they considered scholarly leaders and mentors, particular books and/or authors, certain social trends, and major historical events. From their biographical data, the researcher also examined the doctoral universities, major professors, and early professional experiences prior to entering higher education. Appendix C provides a rank-ordered list of the top ten individuals mentioned as influential. Appendix D provides similar information about publications.

The early experiences of the three members of the first generation who were found to be alive and able to participate in the research included military education and Cooperative Extension. They attended three different universities where each earned doctorates in diverse but related fields, since very few such programs existed at that time. Generally, the attribute mentioned most frequently about their major professors was "an excellent role model for facilitation of learning and flexibility in planning". Subsequent comments from their students about them provided evidence that these individuals carried such traits forward in their teaching practice. In addition, all three mentioned they have realized their career paths as having evolved from numerous interactions and experiences with mentors, colleagues, and students.

Second-generation participants described several different types of early experiences that led them to the academic field of Adult Education; however, most were involved in Cooperative Extension, community development, or teaching. Similarly, influences from their graduate experiences varied across several universities; however, most attended the University of Wisconsin, Madison or the University of Chicago. Expanding opportunities to earn a degree specifically in Adult Education was evident in the second generation in that most of this group earned degrees in the field. The remaining individuals were scattered among several related fields, such as agricultural education, general education, and higher education. Although the group reported numerous different major professors, many studied under either Cyril Houle or Burton Kreitlow. Similarly, the academic leaders named most often as highly influential were Cyril Houle, Malcolm Knowles, and Burton Kreitlow, respectively. Those who felt more influenced by Houle, either directly or indirectly, described their academic experiences as formal and proper. Those associated with Knowles and Kreitlow used words like humanistic, personal, student-driven, and self-directed. In terms of publications, having more to choose from in the second generation, Malcolm Knowles' (1980) book, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Andragogy to Pedagogy,* was mentioned most often, followed closely by *The Inquiring Mind* by Cyril Houle (1961). Although opportunities were increasing, the influences described by this generation remained fairly narrow.

Although members of the third generation reported many diverse areas of practice prior to entering a career in academia, half of the group started their early work as teachers who worked either full or part time in Adult Basic Education, or religious educators, which had not been mentioned by previous generations. Many of the religious

educators were ordained clergy. The opportunities for graduate study in the field and choices of major professor widely varied among this group, providing evidence that expanding higher education opportunities were more available in the field. Participants reported many different universities, with the highest number of graduates from Florida State University, Columbia University, Boston University, and the University of Wisconsin respectively. Together these four universities produced half of the third generation. Slightly more individuals from the third generation earned degrees in Adult Education than from the second generation. In addition, there was a small secondary group in Higher Education, with the remaining members in several related fields of education.

Further evidence of the expanding field was apparent in the large, diverse number of major professors identified, with small groups clustering under Malcolm Knowles and Alan Knox. Of the influential academic leaders named most often, Malcolm Knowles received considerably more comments than any others, followed by Howard McClusky, Alan Knox, and Jack Mezirow. In terms of publications identified as most influential, the single most mentioned book was Eduard Lindeman's *The Meaning of Adult Education* (1926). This was followed closely by Knowles (1980) book on andragogy. Some members of the third generation stressed that while influenced by certain individuals or publications, changes in socio-cultural patterns and historical events such as Civil Rights, Vietnam, or the Women's movement, played a powerful role in their choices and in shifting the focus of attention in the field.

*3 - How does each generation define their philosophical perspectives?*

Across all three generations common themes emerged regarding the participants' personal perspectives about learning in adulthood. These included beliefs in each adult learner as an individual, respect for adult learners as self-directing, involvement of the learner in setting goals and program planning, the joint construction of knowledge, and a commitment to enhancing lifelong learning throughout society.

The differences that arose in viewpoints about the primary purpose of adult education were organized into five distinct categories: generalist, practitioner preparation, activism, civic education, and workforce development. Across all three generations, more individuals considered themselves to be generalists in their approach to the field of academic Adult Education. They stressed a desire for the field to remain eclectic and practical to meet the needs of adult learners in widely diverse environments. In the third generation, several individuals emphasized their desire to see the heart of the field remain focused on the improvement of practice. This perspective was emphasized by the first generation and continued to gain strength throughout successive generations. Related to the generalist belief and increasing from the second to the third generation, a small group of participants stressed the academic professional Adult Educator's role of preparing practitioners, linking theory to practice and continuously learning from practitioners.

A handful of activists, whose beliefs centered on Adult Education as a vehicle for social reform, were identified in both the second and third generations. While a few second-generation activists were graduates of the University of Chicago, the remaining activists had no genealogical connections to others of similar beliefs. With similarities to the activists, there were also a few civic educators in both the second and third generations. Among this group were those who emphasized the need for graduate

programs in Adult Education to remain highly interdisciplinary and to include the study of social and political systems. Together the activists and civic educators seemed to be a minority in the field, yet they perceived the origins of their beliefs stemmed from the beliefs of the forefathers. Although the number of individuals who shared these two perspectives was low, many respondents described them as having too much power over decisions and research agendas within the national organizations.

*4 - How do the participants view the evolution of the field over time and are there differences in the perspectives of each generation?*

Comments about the overall field generally led to discussions about the major national Adult Education organizations such as the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE), the Commission of Professors of Adult Education (CPAE), and the Adult Education Research Conference (AERC). First generation participants described the national organizations as moving through the typical cycles of change and providing a sense of belonging to the field for many diverse members. However, both second- and third-generation participants were generally more critical of AAACE, primarily regarding the disparate internal "camps" and their control over the organization as well as on the focus in the greater field. Comments about CPAE from both the second and third generations focused more on contributions than limitations over time. This included several statements regarding its role in providing a professional identity group and opportunities to exchange ideas among professional colleagues. Critical comments from both the second and third generations were more diverse. Members of the second generation were more concerned about elitism and selectivity of membership and ideas. Conversely, the most common critique from the third generation centered on a lack of connection between academics and practitioners.

In regard to the evolution of the field across time, members of the first generation described their time in the field with excitement and enthusiasm, focusing on rapid expansion, supportive legislation, and foundational funding resources. They emphasized aspects of growth such as the increasing numbers of graduate programs, mounting recognition by society about the value of Adult Education, and expanding efforts of organizations to provide learning opportunities for adults, especially in the workplace. The major movements in the field were identified by them as having moved from the Americanization of immigrants, to Agricultural Extension, to Literacy and ABE, and finally to HRD. They marveled at the advancements of technology in learning, there was concern over the potential loss of personal relationships and interaction.

The increase in specialization in the field continued in comments from the second generation. This was generally attributed to the rising commitment to adult education in other areas such as military, business, medicine, and correctional institutions, in addition to the previously mentioned major movements within the field. Generally, second-generation participants were more critical of the shifting trends in the field. Most first referred to the early excitement associated with growth and development and a strengthening national presence. This was often followed by criticism toward the emergence of specialized "camps" that seemed to overtake the field, weakening the national voice. Some pointed more toward the institutionalization of adult learning and compulsory education. Others felt that the national commitment during Lyndon B. Johnson's "Great Society" era with its ensuing funding for literacy and ABE became

synonymous with Adult Education, reducing the focus on liberal education. The evolution of HRD received similar comments; and, in fact, was one of the most controversial issues discussed among the second generation. Those who were most critical lamented over the loss of focus on liberal development, social reforms, and citizenship. They discussed the heavily capitalistic vision of "learning for earning" in order to increase the bottom line.

Comments on the overall field from the third generation were less critical than those of the second generation and more focused on the advancement of learning in all environments. Most of this group considered HRD just "another delivery system for Adult Education", although many were concerned that HRD had become the new "king" and the broad field of Adult Education had become subservient under it. Several individuals attributed the narrowing of the field to excess time spent at national meetings arguing about what should or should not be considered part of Adult Education, rather than embracing the expanding opportunities for practice and application. Generally, the third generation encouraged the development of research aimed at improving practice and solving social problems in the world by bringing together people with common interests or concerns.

Disappointment in the decreasing level of political savvy and national leadership was a common thread among all three generations. Comments routinely referred to early years in the field when the professional organization maintained a strong political position nationally. In order to rejuvenate political strength at the national level, many individuals from the third generation desired to see increased coordination and support of local, state, and regional organizations.

In addition, several participants felt the decline in political strength was related to a shifting focus in graduate programs, moving from earlier ideals that encouraged social leadership and emphasized an interdisciplinary curricular approach to a more narrow focus aimed simply at the practice of teaching adults. Both first and second-generation members specifically discussed the value of their own interdisciplinary experiences in related areas such as psychology, sociology, and political science. And finally, both second and third-generation participants raised concerns with the lack of Adult Education methods in higher education as well as the limitations imposed by institutions of higher education that often interfered with learner-centered planning and collaborative research.

*5 - How does each generation foresee the future direction of the field?*

The first generation continued to view the future of the field optimistically, focusing on the increasing potential of technology and people's ability to access learning systems and the aging baby boomers' hunger for continuous learning opportunities. Emphasis was also placed on the need for the field to become comfortable with its own ambiguity and diversity and to determine which aspects are no longer needed or applicable in the modern world by examining the diverse places Adult Education is being applied.

Among the second and third generations, there were common elements in the discussions about the future. The second generation primarily favored the role of Adult Educators as change agents in society, with a few who leaned more toward a focus on the practice of helping people to be prepared for success in a rapidly advancing society. The third generation spoke equally of both perspectives, half advocated for the field of Adult

Education to take a leading role in societal problem-solving and half emphasized the development of individual learners in order to navigate adult life better.

## IMPLICATIONS

### *In the Presence of Wisdom*

In her extensive examination of the concept of wisdom, Erikson (1988) determined that it encompasses an attitude or a disposition toward the past, present, and future of life. As this journey through the early years of Adult Education nears the end, the presence of "third age" wisdom has been apparent throughout the conversations with the participants of this study. Although most of the discussions in this research stemmed from questions about the past, participants readily related those events to the present status of the field, and subsequently, based on their experiences and ability to reflect and reconsider, projected ahead offering their thoughts for the future. Some individuals were quite disillusioned with the status of the field, offering little hope for the future. However, several participants challenged both contemporary and future professionals to move to the "forefront of societal issues" and "to get involved and do something to counter the destructive directions of the political and religious right wings" (10). With one last opportunity to preach, the hopes of most of the participants were represented in the following statement:

> The field of Adult Education has an even greater opportunity for service and the potential for "doing good work" in a contemporary and future society that is faced with ever more complex issues to be resolved in all facets of life. Adult Education will enhance its place and status in American and International educational circles and can be a significantly positive force in the identification, clarification, and potential solutions for the difficult decisions that will be necessary in the near and more distant future. Meeting this potential will require an improved ability to integrate, cooperate, coordinate, and unite efforts to meet the challenges of an increasingly complex set of world societal interactions and the educational needs those complexities produce. I have long been convinced that the potential to achieve solutions to world-wide issues begins at the simplest level (the small local community) and advances upward to the more complex urban, regional, national, and international levels. While the process seems insurmountable, it is the individual and small group decisions at the local (community-of-interest) level, when taken together, at least in our society, are the basis for eventual societal actions.

### *Ambiguity and Diversity*

The journey began with a visit through their early years in the field, when many of the participants were practitioners in the field, following different paths for different reasons. Most of them lacked any awareness that the broader field of Adult Education was just over the horizon of their future. Diversity of practice was a theme that stemmed from their early years as practitioners in the field as they shared stories about working in Cooperative Extension, religious education, ABE, military education, community

development, and others. Such diversity has been cited repeatedly in the literature as one of the major factors that have made it difficult to define the field and maintain a strong organizational structure. Diversity was clearly the rule for these individuals as well and continues to be considered by many, one of the current roadblocks to better coordination within the field. However, rather than viewing the diverse nature of the field as a roadblock, several suggested using it to develop leaders in each of the various specialty areas, allowing the diversity to add vitality, ultimately spreading the message of lifelong learning farther and wider in society. Their message was one of encouragement for future generations to work toward a united field with a shared vision and respect for diverse views.

In response to discussion on this issue, one of the first-generation participants felt that people just "have to learn to live with ambiguity and diversity; there's no solution to that". But rather than giving up, he recommended that contemporary members lighten the load by eliminating some of the early pieces of excess baggage that are no longer needed in today's profession. He suggested starting with research on Adult Education professionals who have used their degrees to become leaders in many of the diverse specialty fields of practice, such as health education or business. The goal would be to identify what works well in their situations, which aspects of their graduate experiences were most beneficial, and which can be eliminated. The results of such a project may be one way to set some new directions in the field.

### *Philosophy and Politics*

Difficulty in defining the field of Adult Education remained evident in other aspects of discussion throughout this journey. Those whose definitions centered more on the field of practice generally agreed that it is the uniqueness of adults as learners that binds the field together. They pointed to both andragogy and transformational learning as the two major theories. Among the participants, the largest faction described themselves as generalists, valuing practice that was eclectic and practical. Several smaller subgroups were evident, each of which espoused their own distinct perspectives about what they termed "true" Adult Education. This included activism, civic education, and workforce development.

It appeared that diversity of early practice may have been a factor in the development such disparate philosophies. Some of those whose origins were rooted in organized religion attempted to steer the field toward moral social causes. A few whose origins were more social service in nature, often held tightly to an extremely radical vision of what belongs in Adult Education, to the exclusion of any other perspectives. While this group often championed good causes, the majority of participants felt the zealous tendencies of such individuals resulted in "people jumping into political battles to fight perceived evils without the benefit of a careful analysis of the situation, and that's just not acceptable scholarship" (19). Two of the "evils" most often targeted for attack by the activists were institutionalized education and capitalism.

Opposing the activists were those whose origins were either in military education or labor and industry. Leaning more to the political right throughout their careers, these individuals provided leadership in bridging the gap between education and industry, helping both sides embrace the value of learning and development in the workplace.

The impact of such polarizing forces continued to affect the path of the field over time. This was apparent in discussions about research and literature, graduate programs, and philosophical leadership at the national level. As time progressed, several individuals described how they moved away from the professional organizations, having grown weary of the war and recognizing that it was inflicting more harm than good upon the organizations and the ability of the greater field to evolve. A few even pointed to one particular critical decision in the association that, when thwarted by the extreme activists, resulted in the loss of an opportunity to raise substantially the visibility and professional respect of the field. The message from many of the participants is one of encouragement for future generations to work toward a united field with a shared vision and respect for diverse views.

### *A Mixture of Many Influences*

Another aspect of this journey was an excursion into the formative years of the participants' graduate experiences. Depending on the generation, this involved a wide range of stops along the way. Initially it was anticipated that this aspect of the trip would be filled with rich stories about their early "professor" mentors whose sage wisdom might have had a lifelong impact on the group. Indeed, there were such rich and enjoyable stories about specific well-known, as well as some lesser recognized, names in the field and certain messages from them did withstand the test of time. However, the most common theme among the group centered on their discussion of the many concomitant factors from both their professional and personal lives that converged to fuel and guide their choices and beliefs. They emphasized the interaction of experiences that could not be separated from each other such as influences from institutions, colleagues, historical events, social-cultural developments, family members, and life choices. Several mentioned interaction with their students over time as a powerful source of learning along the way.

Psychologists and sociologists who study adult development may be interested in the comments from these professionals regarding their own learning and development. Their message represents a living example of how of adult development occurs as a result of "a mixture of everything that happens to us" (66). It relates to what adult development theorists would describe as a "life-span perspective" on adult development (Baltes, 1987). Rather than assigning specific stages or phases to the development of adults over time, Baltes' argues that development is a continuous lifetime process that is influenced by a multitude of factors including cultural change, historical effects, and unique individual experiences. In their reflection back over the course of their lives, it is apparent that this group would agree.

### *Graduate Study Recommendations*

The journey continued into the world of higher education with visits to the graduate institutions from which the participants earned their doctoral degrees. This led to general discussions of programs and curricula in academic Adult Education. Most of the group spoke enthusiastically about the benefits of their diverse interdisciplinary experiences as students in newly developing programs. Many sang the praises of their opportunities to explore and build understanding about aspects of adult learning as well as the related fields of sociology, psychology, anthropology, and political science.

Although they were impressed with the growth in numbers of programs over the years, their excitement was tempered with concern. They noted a tendency in contemporary programs to become more institutionalized, narrowly focused, and limited to educational theory. They warned that "if you have a lock-step program you have ruined what (is) considered Adult Education". Their message for leaders in contemporary graduate programs is one of caution to limit institutional restrictions that might stand in the way of the true spirit and vision of the field that involves flexible, collaborative program development in a wide range of related disciplines.

A second aspect related to graduate study involved their collective reflection about the most influential literature in the field over time. Several specific publications were described as foundational work that continues to be valuable for contemporary graduate study. Based on the numerous comments, the following collection of publications should be required reading in order to establish a firm foundation in the field:

Malcolm Knowles, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy* (1980)

Eduard Lindeman, *The Meaning of Adult Education* (1926)

Cyril Houle, *The Inquiring Mind* (1961)

Gale Jensen, A. A. Liveright, and Wilbur Hallenbeck, *Adult Education: Outlines of an Emerging Field of Study* (1964)

J. Roby Kidd, *How Adults Learn* (1973).

### *Unsung Heroes*

Beyond the influences of their graduate institutions and major professors, the participants were asked to direct their reflections toward specific individuals whom they perceived as having been influential on them personally or on the overall field. Across the generations, many of the participants highlighted similar paths to several well-known individuals and/or publications. Malcolm Knowles, Cyril Houle, Burton Kreitlow, and Howard McClusky were identified most often. They shared many rich stories of these individuals and lauded their contributions to the field both as teachers and distinguished writers.

Some participants, however, directed attention to several less traveled, yet scenic, routes along the journey that have often been overlooked in the literature and in historical accounts. They were concerned that the most "popular and prolific" super-stars sometimes overshadowed many local unsung heroes. They therefore suggested that attention should be focused on the work of certain individuals whose impact they described as influential but not widely advertised. Such unsung heroes were described as people working hard both in the field and for the field, with no need or regard for personal self–serving attention. They cautioned that such voices were often muted by the volume of those who were most outspoken or highly published. They passionately urged contemporary leaders to search for a wide range of perspectives from many sources, not just the most publicized, in order to prevent the field from narrowing in on itself further. In addition, in line with the spirit of this study, they advocated for studies of some of these lesser-known individuals and their impact on the field, before it is too late and information is lost. A few participants had plans to spend some retirement time promoting the contributions of some of their most favorite unsung heroes.

*Humility*

During the journey, the participants were asked to point the way to their own accomplishments. It was anticipated that most of the group would use this as an opportunity to spotlight their own publications. While some did, many first mentioned their successful "graduate students who have used their education to attain and perform significant roles in life". Over and over again they described the privilege of having had the opportunity to "touch people's lives". Their collective message was to remind Adult Educators of the potential to touch the future of society by opening the doors to lifelong learning. One individual offered the following message that generally portrayed what most seemed to be saying:

> I think when you get to be my age and you start looking back, . . . it's not how much I've built or how much I've accumulated, . . . but it's what I've done with my life that's affected other people for the time I was here.

With such a humble message, it follows that many of these individuals may very well be modern-day unsung heroes.

Although publication was not their most common response to questions about accomplishments, it was highest on their list of disappointments. This point relates back to the issues of unsung heroes and the increasing institutional constraints of higher education. It seems that many of these individuals were busy developing programs, working with students and generally "doing" Adult Education in their communities, leaving little time to write about it. In addition, they sometimes criticized literature that was produced more for the glory of recognition than to effect real change or advancement in the field. They were concerned that the institutional requirements of higher education and the pressure to publish caused the production of redundant quantity while quality diminished. Looking forward, some suggested that advancements in action research methods may have a positive impact on this issue, providing the appropriate vehicle to both "do" and "study" Adult Education.

*Research and Literature*

Moving on to their thoughts on research and literature over time, first and second-generation participants enthusiastically pointed out the changing terrain of research methods and increasingly diverse areas of practice from the 1960s to the early 1980s. But the road began to narrow in this area as well. Several members of the third-generation pointed to a tendency for people "to quote each other rather than looking outside [the field]" and a propensity to recycle the same concepts over the years. They warned that the "intellectual roots have been cut off" as a result of focusing on "ourselves and what we have done". Caution was expressed that continuing along this route could lead the field into a "dead end." As in discussions about graduate programs, the message from the third generation to future generations encourages collaboration and expansion beyond the limits of Adult Education literature, encompassing the related areas from which the field has evolved.

*Fragmentation*

Cyril Houle's vision of the field of Adult Education was that of an expanding "umbrella that encouraged cross-fertilization across people who were working in various segments of the field". Many of the participants described the beginning of just such efforts to bring together the disparate parts of the field and form a large body of professionals whose common interest was the education of adults. However early victories in the race to organize were overturned as some of the major movements within the field set a different course and forged new roads, taking their loyalties and efforts with them. Such major fractures included Cooperative Extension, ABE, and HRD. Ironically, in their initial phase, each of these segments brought a wave of national attention and funding into the field, creating exciting opportunities to expand. But as each segment grew, they tended to surpass the boundaries of the parent group, splinter off, and subsequently deplete the greater field of valuable power and resources. Groups that were formerly working together became competitive opponents in the pursuit of national attention and funds.

The message from the participants was one of concern and the need to bridge the fragmented segments. To this end, many recommended strengthening the structural foundation of the professional organization through efforts to coordinate Adult Education agencies on several fronts. They suggested a concerted effort to increase collaboration between and among related groups, at the local, state-wide, regional, and national levels, binding the network together around issues of common interest to serve all levels of practitioners, professionals, and leaders. They pointed to other successful professional organizations along the route whose successes were framed around a similar model. Secondly, rejuvenating professional collaboration at all levels builds a sturdy foundation that can sustain efforts to be successful at the legislative level "because in union there is strength".

Several participants expressed particular disappointment in the wide gap between K-12 education and Adult Education. Many described their departments at the university level as being the marginalized "step-child" of the College of Education, with K-12 teacher preparation at the center. Some felt the amorphous nature of the field had been a source of confusion about how lifelong learning fits into the vision of education and society. Others suggested that the work of Adult Education inherently lacks a specific purpose that people can wrap their arms around, whereas in K-12 education the preparation and certification of teachers feeds directly into a structured, clearly defined institutionalized system. A few individuals described success in narrowing this gap by making a concerted effort to collaborate widely with colleagues both within and outside their colleges. In response, the participants offered encouragement to learn from those who are making progress in this area and to increase similar efforts across the field. They emphasized the need to expand the effort at the national level as well, in order to open the doors of dialogue and collaboration between the related professional organizations.

## SOME FINAL THOUGHTS:

## THE RESEARCHER'S REFLECTION

This study has guided the researcher on a journey through the early years of the academic field of Adult Education, with the goal of collecting and learning from the combined experiences of 52 esteemed, long-time professionals. Along the route, there were many twists and turns, hills and valleys, fair weather and storms. Information collected through the tool of oral history directed the path of the journey. At various stops along the way, the tour was narrated by the individual and collective voices of the participant group, as they interjected their ideals and passions for the benefit and enjoyment of the reader. They have graciously guided the process and openly shared their perspectives.

This research is an example of the benefits of listening to the voices of people in their "third age," as described previously. It is hoped that the reader will consider thoughtfully the both the individual and collective messages from those who have given a lifetime of lessons, resources, and experiences to the field. The richness of their reflective wisdom is offered to shed new meaning on the past and stimulate thoughts about goals for the future of the field.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Since this study was limited to members of the first three generations, it may prove informative to replicate it with the fourth generation. Their responses could then be analyzed and compared to the results presented here.

2. Due to limitations in time and resources, the final participant group was limited to only those individuals who both earned their degrees and were employed as faculty in the United States. Further study is recommended by utilizing methods similar to those applied here to dialogue with Adult Education professors from Canada, since interaction between both countries within the field is fairly common. Following that same theme, many other countries outside North America have Adult Education programs at various stages of development. It may prove valuable to investigate the impact of those international experiences upon the development and focus of programs in the United States.

3. Certain universities were repeatedly identified as the source of participants' graduate degrees. A more in-depth study of the impact of the beliefs and messages that emanated from the specific institutions that became top producers of professors may be worthwhile.

4. As this study was planned it was acknowledged that, with little exception, the majority of participants would be white males, as those were the Adult Educators of the past. It is therefore recommended that a similar study be conducted of

women in the field. Similarly, ethnic diversity among the participants was extremely limited. This same process is therefore recommended to be applied with a single racial or ethnic subgroup, such as African-American, Hispanic/Latino, or Asian-Adult Educators across all generations.

5. Some of the research methods applied here may be criticized due to the potential for bias on the part of the researcher, limitations in sample size, or due to the nature of open-ended questions and network sampling . A follow-up study designed to capture a wider range of perspectives in the field is recommended using the themes and issues identified in this study as the basis for a statistical survey instrument and distributing it throughout the entire field.

6. Several influential individuals were repeatedly mentioned by participants whose work has not been thoroughly studied or appreciated. The field may benefit from an in-depth study of the specific influences and accomplishments of some of these "unsung heroes," particularly those who remain available to participate.

7. Many of the participants lauded the success of their graduates who became leaders in the diverse specialty areas of the field. A study of their positions and responsibilities would provide documentation that might be utilized to publicize the value of a degree in Adult Education to university administrators, legislators, potential granting organizations, and society at large. This may be one concrete step toward raising the visibility of the field at several levels.

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## Appendix A

### Participants

Jerold Apps
Roger Axford
Hal Beder
David Boggs
Edgar Boone
Robert Boyd
Albert Campbell
Beverly Cassara
Alex Charters
Harlan Copeland
Phyllis Cunningham
Gordon Darkenwald
John D. Deshler
William Dowling
Mary Jane Even
James Farmer
Robert Fellenz
Jack Ferver
Stanley Grabowski
John Henschke
Roger Hiemstra
John Holden
Roy Ingham
Irwin Jahns
Glen Jensen
Leo Johnson
James Kincaid
Alan Knox
Burton Kreitlow
Leonard Lilley
Carroll Londoner
Huey Long
Violet Malone
Robert Mason
John McKinley
Jack Mezirow
Donald Mocker
Leonard Nadler
John Niemi
John Ohliger
John Peters
Mark Rossman
Russell Robinson
Wayne Schroeder
Donald Seaman
George Spear
Harold Stubblefield
Wilson Thiede
John Tibbets
Curtis Ulmer
Thurman White
William Young

Appendix B

Adult Education Genealogy

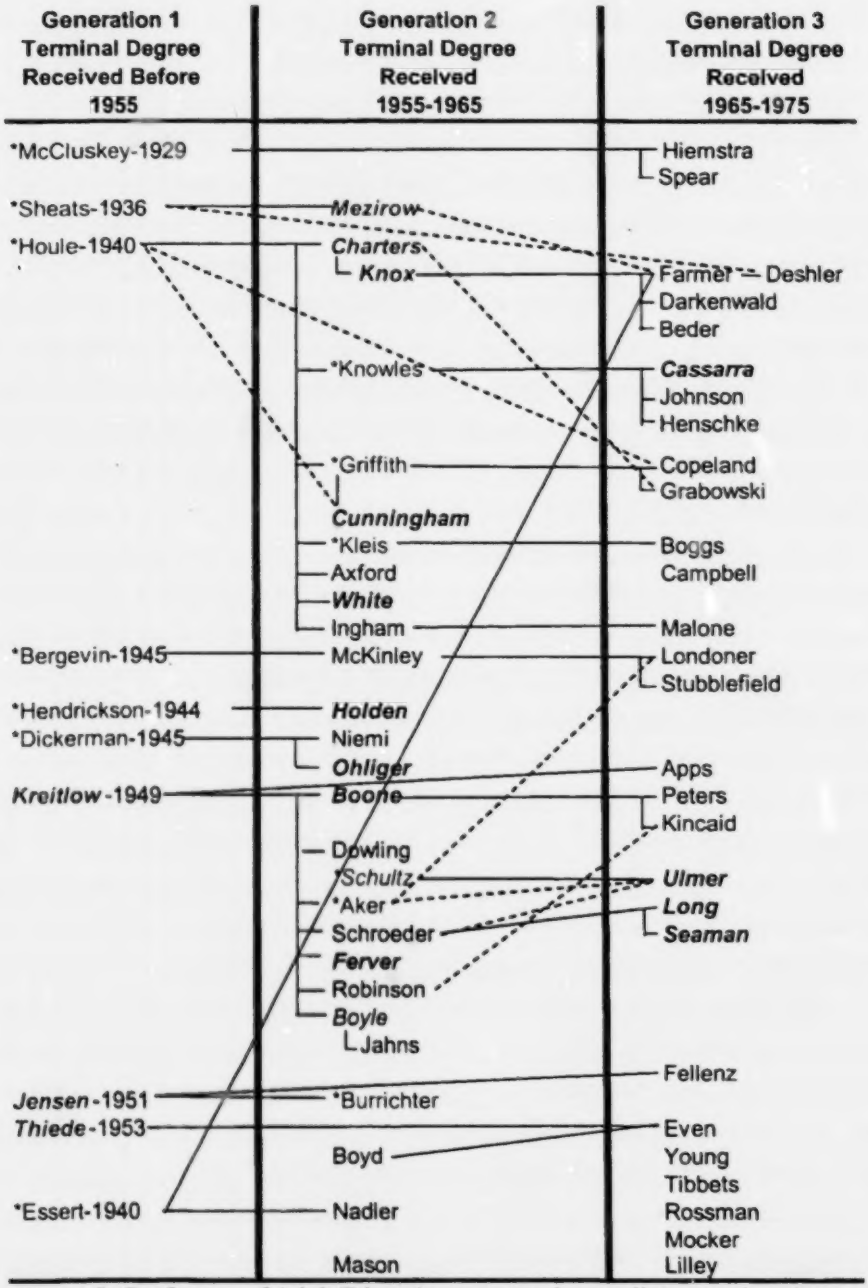


*Figure 2.* Professors of Adult Education presented according to assigned generation and major professor or committee connections. *Note*: * deceased. Phase I participants in ***bold & italic***. Phase II participants in straight font. Non-participants in *italics* only. —— Major Professor ---- Committee Member

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APPENDIX C

*Individuals Identified as Most Influential*

| Influential Individual | Number of Comments by Generation 1st *n* | 2nd *n* | 3rd *n* | Total *n* | Summary of Comments |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Knowles | 1 | 7 | 14 | 22 | Gentle; kind; practical approach; working with people not statistics; a congruent type of person, he lived what he talked |
| Houle | 2 | 10 | 5 | 17 | The predominant figure in the university system; the academician; recognized as the intellectual leader of the field |
| Kreitlow | | 6 | 3 | 9 | Teaching style that stressed involvement and discussion; theory based, but always toward some practical end; student-led learning |
| McClusky | 1 | 1 | 7 | 9 | An intellectual mentor; gentle and insightful but not self-proclaimed; committed to community education and development |
| Knox | | 2 | 7 | 9 | Importance of open systems analysis; helping me to learn to think critically; responsiveness to adult learners' needs |
| Kidd | | 2 | 4 | 6 | Raising awareness of international Adult Education |
| Mezirow | | | 6 | 6 | The importance of transformation theory; treatment of students as colleagues; a pioneer in the area of social commitment |
| Sheats | | 2 | 4 | 6 | Concern for international Adult Education; the caring way he worked with people |
| Freire | | 1 | 4 | 5 | Top conceptual thinker in the area of community-based work |
| Horton | | | 5 | 5 | Provided a spotlight on citizen action in social movements |

*Note*: *n* = number of comments by participants



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Appendix D

*Books Most Frequently Identified as Influential by Participants*

| Author<br>*Title* (Publication Year) | Generations<br>1st<br>*n* | 2nd<br>*n* | 3rd<br>*n* | Total<br>*n* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Malcolm Knowles | | | | |
| *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy* (1980) | | 5 | 10 | 15 |
| *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species* (1978) | | 1 | 5 | 6 |
| *A History of the Adult Education Movement in the United States* (1977) | | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| *Self-Directed Learning: A Guide for Learners and Teachers (1975)* | | | 3 | 3 |
| Total for Knowles | | | | 28 |
| Eduard Lindeman | | | | |
| *The Meaning of Adult Education* (1926) | | 2 | 12 | 14 |
| Cyril Houle | | | | |
| *The Inquiring Mind* (1961) | | 4 | 6 | 10 |
| *The Design of Education* (1972) | | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| Total for Houle | | | | 13 |
| Gale Jensen, A. A. Liveright, and Wilbur Hallenbeck | | | | |
| *Adult Education: Outlines of an Emerging Field of Study* (1964) | | 2 | 6 | 8 |
| J. Roby Kidd | | | | |
| *How Adults Learn* (1973) | | 1 | 7 | 8 |
| Allen Tough | | | | |
| *The Adult's Learning Projects* (1979) | | 1 | 6 | 7 |
| Paul Sheats, C. Jayne, and Robert Spence | | | | |
| *Adult Education: The Community Approach* (1953 ) | | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| C. Hartley Grattan | | | | |
| *In Quest of Knowledge: A Historical Perspective on Adult Education* (1951, 1971) | | 2 | 2 | 4 |

*Note.* *n* = Number of comments by participants.

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